

Understanding Events in Egypt *by Fr. Dave Heney*

In the first week of July, angry people in a distant land deposed their rightfully constituted leader ...but not in Egypt. The British saw Americans do that in 1776, and we still celebrate it with fireworks and parades every July 4th. We forget that King George was our lawful monarch and we were legal British subjects. Yet we deposed a ruler, just as in Egypt now.

Just like Egyptians, Americans were split about this revolt, with about half loyal to the King and half for independence. While many hated the King's harsh economic policies and sought freedom to pursue their own prosperity, many also wanted to remain British. In 1776, a self-proclaimed "Continental Congress" wrote a "Declaration of Independence" based on a higher authority of "inalienable rights ...self-evident truths ...and Nature and Nature's God."

Egypt today is a very poor country, despite a booming economy in the last 20 years. The prior ruler, Hosni Mubarak, funneled almost all that new wealth to an upper elite and very little to the poor, where average income remained only \$2 a day. 50% of Egypt is under the age of 25, and about 50% of them have no work. All they want is to get married and have a family, like everyone else their age around the world, but they cannot without a job. In the 2012 "**Arab Spring**" Egyptians deposed Mubarak and initiated a new democratic process. The Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamic organization, did not join the uprising, but being better disciplined, quickly captured the hastily organized elections, installing Mohamed Morsi as President.

Although Morsi was elected, he never practiced democracy, which is much more than just casting votes. It is also the rule of law and the participation of different groups in govern-

ment. He allowed none of that. Worse still, he did nothing for the economy. Young Egyptians saw Morsi only establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state under an extreme reading of the Koran called "Sharia Law" where, for example, women cannot participate in politics or the economy. *Under Morsi, millions more Egyptians fell under dire poverty in an already desperately poor country.* Political dialogue, international investment, and tourism decreased, while crime, desperation, and religious persecution greatly increased, especially against Christians.

Egyptians know the world runs on a global economy, in which countries either prosper or lose according to set economic rules. Global business needs a stable environment to invest, the rule of law, and commonly accepted business standards, and could not find it in Egypt this last year under Morsi, so it went elsewhere. Who wouldn't? With no effective leadership, *Egypt was spiraling into a massive human catastrophe.* There were many entreaties by Egyptians and world leaders to Morsi to change, but he refused. The people deposed Mubarak for corruption in 2012, and deposed Morsi in 2013 for both economic incompetence and massive neglect of the people's needs. *It is the same story as the American colonies in 1776.*

Egyptians today could easily recognize and adopt these opening ideas from the *Preamble of our Declaration of Independence...*

Preamble of the Declaration of Independence: July 4th, 1776

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should *declare the causes which impel them to the separation*.

We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable Rights*, that among these are *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*, and that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the *consent of the governed*, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, *and to institute new Government*, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should *not be changed for light and transient causes*; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, *it is their duty, to throw off such Government*, and to provide new Guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. *The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations*, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world....

Final Thoughts

Our founders knew it was “self-evident” that if a ruler denies basic human rights, he forfeits the right to rule, but they also set a high bar for revolution. We had to make our case publicly and in a rational manner. Our Declaration laid those reasons out, and Egyptians have as well. Our rebellion arose from political and economic oppression and our desire for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Actual democracy came later, after a long and very violent Revolutionary War, with our Constitution in 1787 that ensured the *full range of democratic institutions*. Even so, our democracy was not fully realized until after the Civil War and perhaps not even until the 1965 Civil Rights Act. Democracy will take time in Egypt as well.

While both Sharia Law and the Declaration both reference God, our Declaration is different. When it cites “Nature and Nature’s God,” it affirms

God’s will is rational, based on common sense, understandable to people of good will everywhere, and not dictated by any one person, as in radical Islam. That is a real difference, and the basis of all Catholic political thought from St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Francis today.

No one knows how events in Egypt will turn out, but we certainly recognize the efforts of those fighting there for political, economic, and religious freedom from our own American history and experience. We share common goals, so let us pray for their success.

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